August 24, 1998 Contact: Clare Perry

Smaller water supply means lower flows

Seasonal Flow Objectives Met at Lower Granite Dam

Portland, Ore. – Columbia River operators at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Portland-based Reservoir Control Center said today they will be able to meet the region's summer flow objective for aiding juvenile fish migration in the lower Snake River. Spring flow objectives had been successfully met earlier this year for the lower Snake and Columbia rivers. Only at McNary Dam on the Columbia River were operators unable to achieve the targeted summer flows. Flows in the Columbia and Snake rivers are augmented, or increased, with additional releases of stored water from upstream dams in spring and summer months as juvenile fish migrate downstream.

The 200,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) summer flow objective at McNary Dam, recommended in the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) 1995 Biological Opinion (BiOp) is the same every year and does not take variations in annual water supply into account. In contrast, the June 21 to Aug. 31 seasonal objective at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River, also defined in the BiOp, varies slightly each year based on annual water supply forecast. This year's summer flow objective of 50,600 cfs at Lower Granite will be met.

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The 1998 water year is expected to yield summer seasonal flows of about 175,000 cfs at McNary Dam, much like the 1995 water year which had similar hydrologic conditions and resulted in seasonal average flows of 165,000 cfs. In contrast, last year's flows past McNary averaged 237,000 cfs, benefiting from the largest January to July volume runoff since 1894.

Average flows vary from the seasonal objective on any given day or week, as river system operators try to accommodate flow requests from salmon managers while balancing demands from other river users and factoring in the amount of available water. Seasonal objectives cannot always be met, even with augmenting flows by drafting the storage projects at Dworshak, Libby, Hungry Horse, and Grand Coulee dams.

"About 75 percent of Columbia River Basin flows are not regulated and are subject to natural runoff conditions," said Cindy Henriksen, chief of the Corps' Reservoir Control Center. "As snowpack diminishes and precipitation decreases, the flow in streams and rivers naturally drops off."

Henriksen said that if there were no dams at Dworshak or the Hell's Canyon Complex, which includes Brownlee, Oxbow and Hell's Canyon dams, current flows in the Lower Snake River would only be about 15,000 cfs, with less than 1,000 cfs moving through the North Fork of the Clearwater River and less than 10,000 cfs past Hell's Canyon.

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